



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
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[Africa]

Stock#: 52138sb
Map Maker: Pigafetta
Date: 1591
Place: Rome
Color: Uncolored
Condition: VG
Size: 24.5 x 17 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

One of the Most Important Maps of Africa Published in the Sixteenth Century, the First Printed Map to Dispute Ptolemy's Source of the Nile River

Filippo Pigafetta's map is a work of towering importance. Engraved by Natale Bonifacio to illustrate Pigafetta's account of the observations made by the Portuguese explorer Duarte Lopes between 1578 and 1584, the map was a remarkable leap forward in the mapping of the African Continent.

The map depicts the African continent from the Mediterranean to the Cape, but it unusually cuts off West Africa to focus on the eastern portions of the landmass. This was perhaps to reflect the Portuguese interest in extending their trade and influence to the interior African power centers, especially to Monomotapa in the south.



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The reader is struck by the accuracy of the coastal outline, as well as by the density of place names and geographic features filling the interior. While not all have a basis in strict fact, this was the most detailed and certainly, for the Congo, the most precise map of Africa ever published to that time. The geography is dominated by large mountain ranges and long rivers. A compass rose is tucked in north central Africa, while scrolling script spells out the various kingdoms, empires, and other political entities and settlements.

The seas are where even more decorative elements are added. Ships and sea monsters ride the waves. A beautiful detail is that the large interior lakes are dotted with serpentine heads; sea snakes haunting the waters.

Cartouches line the right side of the map. In the upper right is a scroll with the papal arms at the top. The text on the scroll explains the achievements of the pope who Pigafetta served, Pope Sixtus V (1521-1590), and proclaims Pigafetta's hope that Sixtus and the Catholic Church will convert all the souls of Africa. At the bottom is the signature of the mapmaker, Pigafetta, and the engraver, Natale Bonifacio.

Farther down the right side is a scale embellished with a large set of dividers to show distance and flanked by two ships in full sail. Below this is another scroll that is a key to the various places of note in and around Cairo.

Finally, in the bottom right corner, is an elaborate dedicatory cartouche which lauds the titles and achievements of Antonio Migliori Vescovo di San Marco. The cartouche is adorned with coats of arms and cornucopias, representing a wish of plenty on the house of the recipient of the dedication. It is dated April 2, 1591 and signed by Pigafetta.

Significance of the Pigafetta map

This map's significance lies in its revolutionary rejection of the Ptolemaic depiction of the interior Africa, one that was then still followed by cartographers, including the famous-atlas maker Ortelius. Pigafetta disputed the traditional Ptolemaic geography of twin lakes on the same latitude near the Mountains of the Moon as the source of the Nile River. Rather, Pigafetta shows two lakes in central Africa, one above the other. The southern one feeds the Zambezi and the Limpopo. The northern lake feeds the Nile and the Zaire. The northern lake is at and north of the equator, as opposed to farther south as Ptolemy placed his lakes. Following Waldseemüller, Pigafetta places a third, smaller lake to the west which is the source of the Congo River.

It is possible that Pigafetta got the idea for these twin lakes from earlier portolan charts. He could have also read of the rejection of the Mountains of the Moon as the source of the Nile in the second edition of



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Ramusio's *Delle Navigationi et Viaggi* (Venice, 1554). Lopes also likely told him of what he had heard from indigenous informants. Wherever he drew the information from, his conception of the two lakes on a longitudinal axis is closer to the actual hydrography of interior Africa with Lake Victoria and Lake Tanganyika and/or Lake Malawi. His was also the first printed map to so explicitly reject Ptolemy's ideas.

Pigafetta incorporated a number of other features in the interior of Africa which appear to derive from authentic indigenous sources. It is without question the most important modern map of Africa published in the 16th Century.

Although not all mapmakers adopted his non-Ptolemaic hydrography, others used him as an influential source for place names and geography of the Congo region. However, the Lopes-Pigafetta lake system was not widely adopted, making this map all the rarer and more significant for its originality, boldness, and relative accuracy.

The voyages of Duarte Lopes and the publication of Pigafetta's *Relatione*

Duarte Lopes was a Portuguese trader who traveled within central Africa, in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola, starting in 1578. After several successful merchant voyages, Lopes was appointed as ambassador for Congo's king, Alvaro II, to Spain (which was then unified with Portugal). Lopes replaced Sebastian da Costa, who had died on his return trip to report to Philip II of Spain.

While ambassador, Lopes sought out mineral specimens to share with his European contacts in the hope they would yield gold, silver, or another precious metal. He also opened the region to trade with Portugal and Spain, a major advantage for the vast Spanish Empire. Finally, Lopes vowed to lobby the Pope to send missionaries to Central Africa.

On his return trip from Congo, Lopes was shipwrecked on the coast of Venezuela. After a year marooned there, he returned to Europe to continue to fight for his causes, although the calls went unheeded. He returned to Congo in 1589 and was never heard from again.

Before he disappeared, however, Lopes told Filippo Pigafetta (ca. 1533-1604) the story of his travels and gave him a single manuscript map. Pigafetta was a historian who traveled extensively. He also served as a Chamberlain to Pope Sextus, a position that would give him access to information and a certain measure of power in Roman society.

Pigafetta published the narrative of Lopes' adventures, *Relatione del realme di Congo et delle circonvicine contrade*, in 1591. The book also included this map as a copperplate engraving, the best of Africa to date, and another, larger scale map of the Congo. It appeared first in Italian (Rome, Bartolomeo Grassi, 1591).



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This map was engraved by Natale Bonifacio (ca. 1537-1592). Bonifacio was born and died in Sibenik, a sea town on the Dalmatian Coast. He first started engraving maps in Venice, before moving to Rome in 1575. There, he became a well-known engraver who was close to the Pope; like Pigafetta, he was a Chamberlain. In 1590, he engraved the plates for a book by papal architect Domenico Fontana, celebrating the erection of a series of obelisks, one of Sixtus V's many architectural projects. The map is dedicated to Antonio Miglioni Vescovo di San Marco, a high-ranking clergyman who was bishop of the diocese of San Marco from 1586 to 1591.

The work was quickly translated into other European languages: Dutch (trans. Martin Everart, Bruges, Amsterdam, 1596), German (trans. Augustine Cassiadore Reinius, published by De Bry, Frankfurt 1597), and Latin (De Bry, Frankfurt, 1598). The translations often included the maps. For example, the German edition, part of the De Bry brothers' *Petit Voyages*, includes versions of the two maps which are similar to the originals, although not as ornate.

Abraham Hartwell, at the request of travel compiler Richard Hakluyt, translated the work into English, and it was published in London in 1597, with maps included. Samuel Purchas included the tale in his *Pilgrimes* (London, 1625) and it is widely accepted that Daniel Defoe used the narrative while writing *The adventures of Captain Singleton* (London, 1720).

Rarity

While the later editions of Pigafetta's map by De Bry and Wolfe appear occasionally on the market, the original Pigafetta engraved by Bonafacio is quite rare. We know of only 1 other example to come through the market in the past 15 years.

Detailed Condition: